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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 005745

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR INTERAGENCY CONSULTATION TEAM FOR
PKK/KADEK IN IRAQ

REF: A. ANKARA 5584

[B](#). ANKARA 4787

[C](#). ANKARA 4499

Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch; reasons 1.5 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Four and a half years after the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, the GOT remains divided over how to deal with the remnants of the terrorist organization, how to handle Kurdish nationalism, and whether to loosen restrictions on Kurdish political and cultural expression. The GOT maintains the US must now make the next move to deal with the PKK/KADEK in northern Iraq. Prospects for resolving the conflict between the State and the Kurdish community are complicated by: 1) the ineffectiveness of the PKK-related "Reintegration Law"; 2) the slow implementation of human rights and social reforms; 3) the alienation of southeastern Kurds from the political process; and 4) lack of GOT assistance for displaced Kurds wishing to return to the southeast. The UNHCR rep in Ankara argues for close cooperation among the GOT, USG, and UNHCR to inform Makhmour refugees of improving conditions in southeast Turkey, and to ensure returnees receive adequate support. Despite occasional cooperation between the GOT and the PUK and KDP in combating the PKK/KADEK, Turks remain deeply suspicious of Iraqi Kurds. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) While the Turkish Government wants our help in eliminating the Kadek safe haven in northern Iraq, it is dealing with the issue separately from the question of a Turkish contribution to the stabilization force. However, U.S.-Turkish cooperation against the PKK/Kadek is essential to convincing the public and many of the elite that Turkish military participation in Iraq is in Turkey's national interest.

GOT: PKK Ball in US Court

[1](#)3. (C) The Turks believe the ball is in our court and will be expecting some visibility on US plans for tackling the PKK/KADEK presence in northern Iraq. We expect their focus to be on questioning the US side about military plans and timetables for action. The GOT needs this visit to demonstrate to skeptics that the US is serious about its commitment to eliminate the threat of PKK/KADEK terror from northern Iraq. No matter how much we want to de-link this issue from the possibility of a Turkish troop contribution to a stabilization force for Iraq, the Turkish public and parliament sees a firm US commitment to deal with the PKK/KADEK as a *sin qua non* for Turkish willingness to help out the coalition in Iraq and recognizing that the evolution to a new Iraq will be in Turkey's interest. To the extent that the visiting USG delegation can boost Turkish confidence about our commitment and demonstrate serious practical cooperation, the visit can go a long way toward getting the Turks to yes on the troop contribution decision.

State Lacks "Post-War" Plan

[1](#)4. (C) The Turkish State, having essentially won the military side of its battle with the PKK/KADEK, has failed to follow up its battlefield successes with a comprehensive "post-war" plan to establish a new relationship with Kurdish communities, especially in the southeast but also in the large urban conglomerations of western Turkey. Some MPs and members of the bureaucracy, particularly in the MFA, want to move quickly to loosen restrictions on Kurdish language and culture and take further steps to bring PKK/KADEK militants back to productive participation in society. Such measures,

they believe, would not only advance Turkey's EU bid but would also eliminate resilient support for the PKK/KADEK. However, elements of the military and bureaucracy credit the defeat of the PKK to an unyielding approach, and remain adamantly opposed to concessions of any kind. They maintain their long-held view of southeastern Kurds as separatists and PKK/KADEK supporters. The effects of this internal GOT conflict can be seen in each of the areas outlined below.

Reintegration Law: Minimal Impact

15. (C) Despite the "Reintegration Law" adopted by Parliament in July (reftels B-C) few armed PKK/KADEK militants have come down from the mountains and turned in their weapons. The vast majority of those who have applied for benefits under the law were already serving prison sentences. According to the latest Ministry of Interior Statistics:

-- 2,094 members of PKK/KADEK or other terrorist organizations already serving prison sentences have applied for benefits. Of these, 380 have been released. (Note: The GOT estimates there are 4,500-5,000 PKK/KADEK fighters in northern Iraq plus approximately 1,000 in southeast Turkey. End Note).

-- 161 active members of terrorist organizations have turned themselves in and applied for benefits; 138 of these have been released, the remainder will be tried in court.

16. (C) Before the law was adopted, Kurds in general and the human rights community universally panned the draft legislation as inadequate, calling instead for a general amnesty for PKK/KADEK militants (reftel C). Various Kurdish groups argued that the law repeated the same flaws that doomed seven previous efforts to encourage militants to surrender, in particular the measure requiring surrendering fighters to provide information about their organizations. GOT officials countered that an amnesty would cause social unrest by allowing terrorists to go unpunished.

17. (C) Before the law was introduced in Parliament, a number of contacts told us earlier drafts were broader, placing fewer conditions on surrendering militants. Later, we were told a committee dominated by representatives of the intelligence and security services reviewed the draft and rejected it as too generous (reftel C).

GOT, Kurds Exchange Blame

18. (C) The GOT blames PKK/KADEK for the law's meager yield. Interior Minister Aksu told the Ambassador September 2 that the organization's top leaders, who are excluded from the benefits of the law, are actively undermining the effort (reftel A). Aksu accused PKK/KADEK leaders of preventing the rank and file from learning about the law. Other GOT officials point to: PKK/KADEK's decision to revoke its unilateral ceasefire; increased attacks by the terrorist organization, including an attempt to assassinate the Tunceli Governor; and the killing by PKK/KADEK members of fellow militant Engin Sincer in northern Iraq, allegedly for his support of the Reintegration Law.

19. (C) Kurdish/human rights activists, in turn, criticize the GOT for failing to support the Reintegration Law with confidence building measures. For the Reintegration Law to work, they argue, PKK/KADEK would have to decide as an organization to support it, and that won't happen unless the GOT goes the extra mile to demonstrate good faith. Specifically, they call on the GOT to: implement Kurdish language reforms adopted by Parliament; release Leyla Zana and three other Kurdish former MPs for the duration of their current retrial; and transfer jailed PKK leader Ocalan from Imrali Island to a mainland prison, where the reduced humidity would presumably relieve his reported respiratory ailments.

Promising Reforms Not Implemented

10. (C) Kurds in southeastern Turkey universally back

Turkey's EU bid, in the hope that EU membership will force the GOT to allow them to express freely their Kurdish identity. To the extent that Kurds support an independent "Kurdistan," it is largely out of the belief that only independence can release them from the stifling grasp of the Turkish State. Over the past two years, the GOT has adopted a number of EU-related reforms intended to loosen restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language and Kurdish names, and provide greater space for political expression in general. The GOT has also adopted legislation designed to crack down on torture, a nationwide problem but one which has left a searing mark in the southeast. These reforms could potentially eliminate support for Kurdish separatism and lead to a new relationship between the State and the Kurdish community. However, there has been little change to date on the streets of places in the broad belt from Bingol to Van, Diyarbakir to Hakkari. Kurds have been frustrated by the slow pace of implementation, as anti-reform elements of the bureaucracy have dragged their feet and undermined impressive-seeming legislation by drafting highly restrictive implementing regulations.

Political Alienation

11. (C) In the November 2002 national elections, the pro-Kurdish DEHAP Party won a landslide victory in the southeast (DEHAP's left-wing character means, however, that it would be vulnerable if there were a right-of-center pro-Kurdish alternative). However, like its predecessors, DEHAP failed to pass the threshold of 10 percent of the national vote required to enter Parliament. This is a recurring theme: Kurds in the southeast overwhelmingly back the "Kurdish" party; while Kurds elsewhere, more integrated into Turkish society, support other parties, though they retain strong feelings of Kurdishness; as a result, the Kurdish party fails to cross the 10 percent threshold. Southeastern Kurds feel alienated by a democratic process in which, as they see it, their votes are meaningless.

12. (C) To make matters worse, police and prosecutors regularly harass DEHAP (and its predecessors before it) and take its leaders to court. In March, the Constitutional Court announced its decision to close HADEP (DEHAP's predecessor) on separatist charges, on the same day prosecutors opened a case to close DEHAP on similar charges. In the past, authorities also closed two of HADEP's predecessors.

Few Displaced Returning

13. (C) EU membership criteria require the GOT to establish a program to develop the economy of the southeast and enhance assistance to those displaced from the region during the height of the PKK conflict who want to return to their homes. This has proven to be one of the most difficult challenges in Turkey's EU bid. The GOT has argued for more time, claiming, with some justification, that this effort will involve a long-term economic project. But the GOT to date has conducted only limited, secretive return programs. Powerful elements of the State, particularly the security services, do not want displaced Kurds to return to the southeast, where they assume Kurdish identity is strongest. They believe time is their ally -- the longer displaced Kurds remain outside the southeast, the more they will assimilate into mainstream society. For the Kurds, however, the lack of support for returns is proof of the State's continued hostility.

Makhmour

14. (C) According to UNHCR Ankara rep Gesche Karrenbrock, the end of PKK/KADEK's unilateral ceasefire has the Turkish refugee residents of northern Iraq's Makhmour camp nervous. Those who previously were inclined to accept repatriation to Turkey may now prefer to wait and see how Turkey responds to recent violence in the southeast, and whether there will be more violence there. Karrenbrock cautioned that the more the camp population feels pressured to return to Turkey, the less likely they are to do so. She reported that there had been two US military visits to the camp, during which US troops were accompanied by Turkish liaison officers, and that these visits, which were not run through the UNHCR, were not welcomed by the camp population. The refugees, she said,

felt pressured to make a repatriation decision based on changes that had taken place in Iraq, not in Turkey.

15. (C) Karrenbrock stressed that there was a need to separate the true civilians in the camp from militants and worried that the UN and the GOT had only budgeted for a small number of Makhmour returnees. If a large group decided to return, there would be a financial crunch. She also worried that the GOT was not prepared to facilitate the integration of returnees via a "fast-track" sympathetic approach, including legal and economic assistance. Without these, returnees will wonder why they came back, and those remaining behind will not follow. Finally, she said the camp residents lack a clear sense of what exactly is on offer in Turkey - not just in terms of material assistance, but of signs that they are wanted back in Turkey. She said that whoever works on the Makhmour returns needs to talk to as many people in camp as possible, and not just the "leaders" who may screen information for political reasons. Camp residents, Karrenbrock said, need to know what is going on in the fields of cultural rights, the lifting of emergency rule and other real openings in the southeast, as well as good examples of successful returnees. She made a case that the US and Turkey should work with the UNHCR on these issues.

Turkish attitudes towards Iraqi Kurds

16. (C) Statements from PM Erdogan and FM Gul notwithstanding, with rare exception, Turks view Iraqi Kurds with suspicion and distrust. Turks broadly see the Iraqi Kurds as separatists who at worst assist the PKK/KADEK, and at best are sympathetic to the PKK/KADEK and antagonistic to Turkey. While acknowledging that at times both the KDP and the PUK have assisted Turkey in its fight against the PKK/KADEK, Turks also accuse both the KDP and the PUK of assisting and providing safehaven to the PKK/KADEK. Most Turks believe that whatever the Iraqi Kurds say, their ultimate aspiration is an independent Kurdish state, with dire implications for Turkey. How bad is it? Barzani and Talabani are regularly vilified in Turkey and considered as some kind of war-lords turned political party bosses.

Kurdish Cross-Border Solidarity

17. (C) At the same time, Turkish Kurds feel a strong solidarity with Iraqi Kurds, though they are divided by linguistic and cultural differences. Between 60 and 70 Kurdish AK MPs voted against the transit of US troops through Turkey into Iraq in the run-up to the war, fearing the consequences of a wave of Turkish troops into northern Iraq. High-level contacts have told us Kurdish MPs remain a question mark concerning the possibility of a Turkish contribution to a stabilization force in Iraq.

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